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CIA domestic spying?

By Dan Thomasson

PRESIDENT Reagan's proposed executive order that would, in effect, permit domestic spying by the CIA is the kind of dangerous step that almost kept the intelligence agency from ever being created.

Back in the late '40s, when William J. "Wild Bill" Donovan presented his master plan for a new Central Intelligence Agency to Harry Truman, word was leaked to the press that the dynamic Office of Strategic Services chief had proposed a sinister scheme to spy on Americans.

While not quite accurate, the furor it caused in Congress was so intense that Donovan's proposal was saved only by the strongest assurance of its proponents that the new agency would have absolutely no responsibility for domestic intelligence gathering. That function would remain in the hands of the FBI.

As a footnote, the premature leak of the CIA plan also was partially responsible for Donovan's not being named to head the peacetime successor of his beloved OSS. There is more than just speculation that Donovan's political enemies in the Truman White House deliberately leaked the CIA domestic spying story to scuttle his chances.

But Donovan, who died in 1959, had the last laugh. For until recently those who learned their craft at Donovan's knee did hold sway over the CIA.

Suffice it to say they were constantly aware of the havoc that could be wrought on their operation by the mere suspicion that they were meddling in domestic counter-intelligence. And until the turbulence brought on by the Vietnam War erupted in the 1960s, domestic involvement was about the only real taboo in the CIA.

(True, prior to this the agency would pick the brains of businessmen returning from overseas and even employ members of the National Student Association in their frequent worldwide travels. But actual spying in this country was, at least as far as anyone can determine, not sanctioned.)

Sometime during late 1965 or early 1966, J. Edgar Hoover, whose relationship with his counterparts in the CIA never had been that cordial, broke almost all relations with the agency, including co-operations from his agents. The date is obscure because it was done without fanfare, of course, and the reasons for it remain a mystery.

It is suspected, however, that Hoover discovered that the CIA had crossed the line into FBI territory. That theory gained credence in the mid '70s when it was revealed that



the CIA had been involved in the surveillance and infiltration of the anti-war movement in what had become a furious all-out attempt by the Nixon administration to prove that U.S. radicals were financed or otherwise linked to this nation's foreign enemies.

Disclosure of the CIA's domestic operations, as could be expected, brought a storm of congressional protest equal to the original protest in 1947. Both the Senate and the House established new intelligence committees and the mood for reform was so strong that the agency's covert operations were severely hampered. That too would pass as even the agency's most determined critics in Congress conceded that perhaps they had gone too far.

Now comes Reagan, against this background, with a proposed executive order that includes a section permitting just what Donovan was wrongly accused of advocating. It would permit intelligence agencies, including the CIA, to collect information about Americans and foreigners residing in this country. In other words, they could conduct domestic spying operations.

Again the furor has begun in Congress, as well it should. An intelligence agency, which like the KGB spends a great deal of its time spying on its own citizens, is the last thing this country needs.

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